

Background Material
of 3 November

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3 November 1962

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MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence
SUBJECT : US and Soviet Statements on the Terms
of a Cuban Settlement

1. Khrushchev's initial overture for a settlement was set forth in guarded language in his private letter of 26 October to President Kennedy. This letter was intended as a "feeler" to probe the President's willingness to provide Khrushchev with a face-saving formula to cover a major backdown. It was, therefore, cast in vague and imprecise language as regards the specific terms of a settlement. Khrushchev, however, made it clear that the basic formula he was offering the President involved Soviet withdrawal of offensive weapons in exchange for a US guarantee that it would not attack Cuba:

"If assurances were given by the President and the government of the US that the USA itself would not participate in an attack on Cuba and would restrain others from actions of this sort, if you would recall your fleet, this would immediately change everything. I am not speaking for Fidel Castro, but I think that he and the government of Cuba, evidently, would declare demobilization and would appeal to the people to get down to peaceful labor. Then, too, the question of armaments would disappear, since, if there is no threat, then armaments are a burden for every people. Then, too, the question of the destruction, not only of the armaments which you call offensive, but of all other armaments as well, would look different....

"Let us therefore show statesmanlike wisdom. I propose: we, for our part, will declare that our ships bound for Cuba will not carry any kind of armaments. You would declare that the US will not invade Cuba with its forces and will not support any sort of forces which might intend to carry

SECRET

Approved For Release 2004/07/08 : CIA-RDP80B01676R001800020010-2

10/16/11

SECRET

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out an invasion of Cuba. Then the necessity for the presence of our military specialists in Cuba would disappear."

2. In less than 24 hours Khrushchev sent another letter which was publicized immediately and was probably designed to stimulate pressure on the US to begin negotiations at once. This letter, which contained Khrushchev's first public proposals for a settlement, called for reciprocal Soviet-US withdrawals of offensive weapons from Cuba and Turkey under international supervision and for mutual non-aggression guarantees covering these two countries. Khrushchev expressed the belief that his scheme for a Turkey-Cuba exchange provided the "basis for a settlement."

3. On 27 October, President Kennedy replied to Khrushchev's private letter of the previous day and ignored the subsequent public letter. The President accepted the basic formula presented in the 26 October letter, made procedural proposals for negotiating a formal agreement, and set forth his understanding of Khrushchev's proposal in more precise terms. The President made it clear, however, that the "first thing that needs to be done...is for work to cease on offensive missile bases in Cuba and for all weapons systems in Cuba capable of offensive use to be rendered inoperable, under effective UN arrangements." The President then stated that, "assuming this is done promptly," US representatives at the UN had been given instructions which would permit them to work out, in cooperation with U Thant, "an arrangement for a permanent solution to the Cuban problem along the lines suggested in your letter of October 26th." President Kennedy then specified the "key elements" of Khrushchev's proposals which, he said "seem generally acceptable as I understand them." These were:

"1) You would agree to remove these weapons systems from Cuba under appropriate United Nations observation and supervision; and undertake, with suitable safeguards, to halt the further introduction of such weapons systems into Cuba.

"2) We, on our part, would agree--upon the establishment of adequate arrangements through the

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United Nations, to ensure the carrying out and continuation of these commitments--(a) to remove promptly the quarantine measures now in effect and (b) to give assurances against an invasion of Cuba. I am confident that other nations of the Western Hemisphere would be prepared to do likewise."

4. Khrushchev's public backdown letter of 28 October was confined to stating the USSR's intention to dismantle and remove the weapons under some undefined form of UN verification. He did not elaborate on the terms of his 26 October proposal, and he did not challenge or question President Kennedy's definition of the proposed mutual undertakings. But he did not specifically accept the President's statement of these commitments:

"The Soviet government, in addition to earlier instructions on the discontinuation of further work on weapons construction sites, has given a new order to dismantle the arms which you described as offensive, and to crate and return them to the Soviet Union."

Khrushchev represented the President's 27 October offer to give assurances against an attack on Cuba as a formal commitment:

"I regard with respect and trust the statement you made in your message of 27 October 1962 that there would be no attack, no invasion of Cuba, and not only on the part of the US, but also on the part of other nations of the Western Hemisphere, as you said in your same message. Then the motives which induced us to render assistance of such a kind to Cuba disappear."

Khrushchev added: "We are prepared to reach agreement to enable UN representatives to verify the dismantling of these means. Thus in view of the assurances you have given and our instructions on dismantling, there is every condition for eliminating the present conflict."

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5. President Kennedy's 28 October reply to Khrushchev's message of the same date concluded the exchange: "I consider my letter to you of October 27 and your reply today as firm undertakings on the part of both our governments which should be promptly carried out."

Ray S. Cline
Deputy Director (Intelligence)

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